

Vicksburg Is the Key: The Struggle for the Mississippi River

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Review

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McFeely, William S. *Ulysses S. Grant: An Album: Warrior, Husband, Traveler.*, W. W. Norton and Co., \$35.00 ISBN 393020320

General in black and white:

Illustrated biography of a Union warrior

Nearly forty years have elapsed since the last substantial photographic collection of Ulysses S. Grant's life was assembled. In *U.S. Grant Album*, published in 1966, historian Lawrence A. Frost presented 344 photographs and engravings of Grant, his comrades, family, friends, places, and mementos associated with his life. An updated version of this kind of comprehensive catalog of Grant's life, including all images taken from life of the Union general and president, badly needs to be tackled. William S. McFeely's new book is not that work. Instead, the Pulitzer-prize-winning historian (*Grant: a Biography*), offers up a selection of 115 images, omitting many important Grant photographs, providing an image-driven taste of the Grant experience rather than a sweeping tour of the whole story. Somewhat disappointingly, many images are not photographs but are engravings.

The real pleasure and value of McFeely's book comes from the narrative text that accompanies the rich selection of imagery. McFeely's prose is that of a sage interpreter of Grant's life experience. He therefore provides readers with an outstanding tour of the different, seemingly contradictory turns in Grant's life, making this book an important and highly enjoyable contribution to the Grant literature. Passages from the author are often illuminating and provocative. McFeely opens the volume on the subject of Grant's relationship with slavery, concluding, It is Ulysses S. Grant's ironic fate that his life illustrates both sides of the great divide that has prevailed in American history over what the Civil War meant. Did it mean a triumphant abolition of the peculiar institution, or was its nobility lessened because concern for black Americans was swept under the rug for seven long decades ahead?

McFeely here delivers a text filled with thought-provoking, complex interpretations of Grant, his friends and associates, and what they meant to the Civil War and the United States overall. He also delves into Grant's personal story and describes the love between Julia and Ulysses Grant, commencing with the statement, Julia Grant needs rescuing. U.S. Grant's generalship is examined via the milestones of Fort Donelson, Vicksburg, Chattanooga, the Wilderness, and capitulation of the Rebels. The basic story of Grant's unique transformation during the war appears in these pages, suitably illustrated by important imagery.

The author next explores Grant and the meaning of war, the peripatetic Grants, the Grants' trip around the world following Ulysses' presidency, and the desperate writing of Grant's memoirs in the final days of the general's life. Though the images are well known and do not surprise, the words are special. About those who questioned Grant's hard work on the tome that would salvage his family, the author concludes, they failed to see that Grant's life had become his book; when it was finished, so was he.

This handsome addition to the Grant bookshelf will not become this era's ultimate Grant picture book. However, it will be enjoyed by pleasure readers and by serious students of Grant as a valuable and thoughtful addition to interpreting what Grant meant in his own days and what he means to us in ours.

David J. Eicher is editor of Astronomy magazine and author of seven Civil War books, including The Longest Night (Simon & Schuster); Gettysburg Battlefield (Chronicle Books); and Civil War High Commands (Stanford University Press).